

SANTA BARBARA FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

SPRING 2026 RULES & REGULATIONS



"Always About the Kids!"

OVERVIEW

Santa Barbara Friday Night Lights (FNL) is a 6-on-6 flag football league designed to be fun, competitive, and safe for all participants. Both running and passing plays are permitted; however, designated No-Running Zones exist near midfield and each end zone to reduce power-running situations. The defensive team may cover receivers, rush the passer, and pull flags to make tackles. This is an intentionally non-contact sport.

THE BASICS

Coin Toss & Possession

- A coin toss determines initial possession. The winner may choose to start on offense or defense.
- The team that starts on offense in the first half will start on defense in the second half. The word "Defer" is not used.
- After halftime, teams change sides and possession transfers to the team that lost the coin toss.
- All possession changes — except interceptions — begin with the new offensive team taking the ball at their own 5-yard line. Interceptions may be returned.

Downs & Scoring

- The offensive team takes possession at its own 5-yard line and has 3 plays to advance the ball across midfield for a first down.
- Once the offense crosses midfield, it has 3 plays to score a touchdown. If it fails to score, possession transfers and the opposing team begins their drive at their own 5-yard line.
- If the offense fails to reach midfield, possession changes and the opposing team starts from its own 5-yard line.

Coaching on the Field

For the Kindergarten, 1st/2nd Grade, and 3rd/4th Grade divisions only: a maximum of one (1) coach per team is permitted on the field at all times.

PLAYERS & PARTICIPATION

FNL is committed to balanced playing time for every athlete, regardless of practice attendance. The following substitution policies apply to all games.

9-Player Roster

- First Quarter: Three players play offense only; three different players play defense only; the remaining three play the entire quarter.
- 2nd through 4th Quarters: Three different players sit each quarter. No exceptions.

8-Player Roster

• Two different players will sit during each of the four quarters. Every player plays a minimum of three out of four quarters.

SUBSTITUTIONS ARE ONLY PERMITTED AT QUARTER BREAKS UNLESS AN INJURY OCCURS. All players must play a minimum of 3 out of 4 quarters.

Play Advantage Rule (8 or 9 vs. 7 Players)

• If one team has 8 or 9 players and the opposing team has only 7, the coach of the 7-player team must notify the referee before the game begins.

• The referee will then inform the 8/9-player team's coach, who has the option to identify one player on the 7-player team who must sit one quarter. The 7-player team's coach determines which quarter that player sits.

• If this is not identified before the start of the game, the 8/9-player team's coach may still designate the player at any point during the game.

PLAYOFFS ONLY: If a team has only 7 players, the team with 8 or 9 players may select three (3) players on the 7-player team who must each sit out one quarter.

***Late arriving players must sit one full quarter before entering the game and may only enter at the start of a quarter.**

Non-Compliance Penalty

If a coach fails to adhere to the player participation policy and the infraction is caught before the end of the game, 7 points will be awarded to the opposing team for each occurrence. A second violation in a subsequent game results in a game forfeiture and a 1-game suspension for the Head Coach.

• Referees will assist in managing the participation policy, but compliance is ultimately the Head Coach's responsibility.

• Any variation to this policy requires Commissioner approval before the game begins, and must be communicated to the opposing head coach.

• Teams must field a minimum of 5 players at all times.

NO FILL-IN PLAYERS. Registered players must play only for their own team. Any team using an unregistered fill-in player is subject to game forfeiture and/or disqualification from the season.

KEEPING GAMES FAIR & FUN

FNL recognizes that lopsided games are not enjoyable for anyone. To maintain competitive balance during the regular season, the following rules apply. These rules do not apply during playoff games.

20-Point Rule (20/2)

• When a team leads by 20 or more points, the referee will reduce that team's downs from 3 to 2 — both to reach the first down at midfield and to score.

• Once the margin drops to 19 points or fewer, the team's downs immediately return to 3.

30-Point Rule (30/4)

• When a team leads by 30 or more points, the trailing team is permitted 4 downs to advance for a first down and 4 downs to score, while the leading team remains on 2 downs.

• Once the margin drops to 29 points or fewer, the trailing team's downs immediately return to 3.

FNL standings are based on POINTS ALLOWED, not points scored. When a lopsided game occurs, the leading team's defense is what affects their ranking.

TIMING & OVERTIME

Game Clock

• Games consist of four 10-minute running-clock quarters (40 minutes total).

• A 1-minute water break is held between quarters. Halftime is 3–5 minutes.

• Once the ball is spotted, the offense has 30 seconds to snap the ball. One warning may be issued before a Delay of Game penalty is enforced.

• Each team receives two (2) timeouts per half. Unused timeouts do not carry over to the second half.

Tied Games

- If the score is tied at the end of regulation, teams in the 5th/6th Grade and 7th/8th Grade divisions proceed to overtime.
- Kindergarten, 1st/2nd Grade, and 3rd/4th Grade games that end in a tie remain a tie. No overtime is played.

Overtime (5th/6th and 7th/8th Grade Divisions Only)

- The officials will conduct an overtime coin toss at midfield. The visiting team calls heads or tails. The winner chooses to play offense or defense first. The decision cannot be deferred.
- The team that loses the coin toss decides which end of the field will be used.
- Each overtime period consists of two possessions — one for each team. The team on offense starts at midfield and has 3 downs to score.
- Each team receives one (1) timeout per overtime period. Unused timeouts do not carry over between periods.
- A defensive turnover (interception) is a dead ball and ends that offensive possession.
- After a touchdown in the first overtime, a team may attempt a 1-point or 2-point conversion.
- If the game remains tied after the first overtime, additional overtime periods are played. In the second overtime and beyond, the teams swap who has possession first, and both teams run alternating 1-point conversion plays instead of full drives. The first team to score and stop the other team from scoring wins. If both teams score, the process repeats.

SCORING

- Touchdown: 6 points
- 1-Point Conversion: Played from the 5-yard line
- 2-Point Conversion: Played from the 12-yard line

RUNNING

- • The quarterback (QB) may not run with the ball.
- • Handoffs, laterals, and pitches are permitted in accordance with NFL rules. No center sneaks are allowed.
- No-Running Zones are located approximately 5 yards on either side of midfield and approximately 5 yards from each end zone. In these zones, the ball must be advanced by a forward pass.
- **Forward Pass Requirements for all 5th/6th & 7th/8th grade teams:** When the offense is in the no run zone, any forward pass must be caught beyond the plane of the line of scrimmage.
- The player who receives a handoff, lateral, or pitch may throw a forward pass from behind the line of scrimmage. In a No-Running Zone, the ball must be thrown forward.
- Once the ball is handed off, lateraled, or pitched, all defensive players are eligible to rush immediately.
- Spinning and jumping are permitted. Ball carriers may not dive forward to gain yardage or score.
- The ball is spotted at the location of the ball carrier's feet at the moment the flag is pulled — not at the location of the ball itself.
- A ball carrier must make a reasonable effort to avoid intentionally running over or initiating aggressive contact with a defender. Violation is an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

RECEIVING

All players, including the QB (when the ball has been handed off, lateraled, or pitched behind the line of scrimmage), are eligible to receive forward passes. As in the NFL, only one player may be in motion at a time. A receiver must have at least one foot inbounds to complete a legal catch.

PASSING

QB Pass Clock

- The quarterback has a 7-second pass clock from the moment of the snap. If the QB has not released the ball within 7 seconds, the play is dead — loss of down. The 7-second clock is no longer in effect once the ball is handed off.

Forward Pass Rules

- A forward pass is any action where an offensive player propels the ball forward through the air toward a teammate.
- All forward passes must originate from behind the line of scrimmage. Once a passer's back leg has crossed the line of scrimmage, a forward pass is illegal.
- A forward pass may be thrown overhand or underhand. Any pass traveling forward is classified as a forward pass.
- Only one forward pass is permitted per play.
- Shovel passes are permitted.
- In a No-Running Zone, any offensive player may throw a forward pass, provided the center properly snaps the ball to the QB first. The QB may also lateral or hand the ball backward to a running back in the No-Running Zone, as long as the ball is ultimately advanced across the line of scrimmage via a forward pass within 7 seconds of the snap.
- Interceptions may be returned.

RUSHING THE QUARTERBACK

- All players who rush the QB must line up at least 10 yards from the line of scrimmage — as marked by the referee — at the time of the snap. Any number of players may rush.
- Defenders not rushing the QB may hold position at the line of scrimmage until the ball leaves the QB's hands.
- Once the ball is handed off, the 10-yard rule no longer applies and all defenders may advance freely.

NO BLOCKING, TACKLING, OR STRIPPING OF THE BALL IS PERMITTED AT ANY TIME.

DEAD BALL SITUATIONS

The ball must be snapped between the center's legs (not to either side) to initiate each play. Play is immediately ruled dead when any of the following occurs:

- The ball carrier's flag is pulled.
- The ball carrier steps out of bounds.
- A touchdown or safety is scored.
- The ball carrier's knee contacts the ground.
- The ball carrier's flag falls off during a play.
- The ball carrier's flags are not properly positioned at the sides of the hips. This determination is at the referee's discretion, and a warning may be issued in lieu of a dead ball call. It is the responsibility of coaches and players to monitor and correct flag placement throughout the game.

THERE ARE NO FUMBLES. The ball cannot be stripped. The ball is spotted at the location where it contacts the ground.

SPORTSMANSHIP & CONDUCT

General Conduct

FNL expects all participants — players, coaches, and spectators — to conduct themselves with respect and sportsmanship at all times.

- If the referee or commissioner observes any act of tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking, or unsportsmanlike behavior, the game will be stopped and the offending party — whether player, coach, or fan — may be ejected.
- The penalty for an unsportsmanlike act: dead ball at the point of the infraction with an automatic first down granted to the opposing team. If the penalty is against the offense: 10 yards from the spot of the foul plus loss of down.

FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.

Trash Talk

- Trash talking is strictly prohibited. Officials have the authority to determine what constitutes offensive language.
- A referee may issue one warning. If trash talk continues, the offending player, coach, or fan is subject to ejection.
- A game will not resume until an ejected party has left the premises. If they refuse to leave, the referee will immediately forfeit the game and award the win to the opposing team.

- Any individual ejected from a game is prohibited from being on the premises for the next game. A second ejection during the season results in exclusion from the next two games and may lead to dismissal from the league with no refund.

Coach Conduct & Referee Communication

FNL referees are to be treated with respect. Excessive verbal complaints toward officials during play are no longer permitted. Coaches have the following options if they wish to address a call:

- Use a timeout to speak with the referee. The team will be charged one timeout.
- Wait until a quarter break or halftime to speak privately and calmly with the referee. The opposing coach may join the conversation.
- All calls and no-calls made by a referee are final and cannot be reversed due to disagreement by coaches, players, or spectators.

Penalties for Coach Misconduct:

- 1st Violation: Loss of possession — first down awarded to opposing team at midfield.
- 2nd Violation: Ejection of the offending coach from the game.

PENALTIES

All penalties are called by the referee. All penalties may be declined by the non-offending team.

Defensive Penalties — All result in an Automatic First Down

- Offsides: 5 yards from the previous spot + automatic first down.
- Pass Interference: 10 yards from the previous spot + automatic first down.
- Illegal Contact (holding, blocking, etc.): 10 yards from the spot of the foul + automatic first down.
 - *Example A:* On 2nd down, Team A runs 20 yards but a foul occurs 8 yards into the run. Team A begins 3rd down 2 yards behind where 2nd down started.
 - *Example B:* On 1st down, Team A's pass is incomplete. A blocking foul occurred 12 yards downfield. Penalty is 10 yards from the line of scrimmage.
- Illegal Flag Pull (before receiver has the ball): 10 yards from the previous spot + automatic first down, regardless of whether the pass is caught.
- Illegal Rush (inside the 10-yard marker): 10 yards from the previous spot + automatic first down.
- Roughing the Passer: 10 yards assessed from the most advantageous spot for the offense + automatic first down.
 - *Example A:* QB is roughed but completes a 15-yard pass — penalty is added to the end of the run.
 - *Example B:* QB is roughed on an incomplete pass — penalty is 10 yards from the line of scrimmage.
- Unnecessary Roughness: 10 yards from the most advantageous spot for the offense + automatic first down.
- "Last Man Standing": If the last defender tackles the ball carrier instead of pulling the flag, or intentionally pulls a flag early to prevent a touchdown — Automatic Touchdown is awarded. Player is also subject to an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty and ejection.

Offensive Penalties — All result in a Loss of Down

- Illegal Motion (multiple men in motion, false start, etc.): 5 yards from the previous spot + loss of down.
- Illegal Forward Pass (pass thrown beyond the line of scrimmage): 5 yards from the previous spot + loss of down.
- Offensive Pass Interference (illegal pick play, pushing off/away defender): 10 yards from the previous spot + loss of down.
- Flag Guarding: 10 yards from the spot of the foul + loss of down.
 - *Example:* Starting at Team A's own 5-yard line on 2nd down, the runner reaches Team B's 5-yard line but guards their flag before entering the end zone. The penalty is assessed from Team B's 5-yard line, placing Team A 15 yards from the end zone on 2nd down. The first down gained during the run is lost because all offensive penalties carry a loss of down.
- Unnecessary Roughness: 10 yards from the spot of the foul + loss of down.
- Delay of Game: Clock stops; 10 yards from the line of scrimmage + loss of down.
- Improper Flag Placement (repeated): If the referee stops play three times in a single game for the same team due to improperly placed flags, a Delay of Game penalty may be enforced. Sequence: (1) Reminder, (2) Warning, (3) Delay of Game penalty.

Only the team captain may ask the referee for rule clarifications. Players may not question judgment calls. A game cannot end on a defensive penalty unless the offense declines it.

STANDINGS & PLAYOFF SEEDING

Official league standings and playoff seedings are determined using the following tiebreakers, in order:

1. Win/Loss Winning Percentage (all games included)
2. Head-to-Head Record
3. Average Points Allowed Per Game
4. Coin Toss

For playoff seeding: all first-place teams receive top seeds; the tiebreaker order above is then applied to remaining teams.

ATTIRE & EQUIPMENT

- Cleats are permitted, except metal spikes. Equipment inspections will be conducted.
- All players must wear a protective mouthpiece at all times — no exceptions. Mouthguard's are available for purchase at the FNL snack bar.
- Official FNL team jerseys, shorts, and FNL flags must be worn during all games.
- The following are NOT permitted: hats, hoodies, jewelry, or sunglasses during play.
- Flags must be a different color from the player's shorts. Flags must not be altered in any way. Any player found to have tampered with their flags will be immediately suspended from the league. No warnings will be given.
- Shorts must have no stripes or pockets. FNL commissioners and/or referees will determine all uniform violations. Violations must be corrected immediately. If a violation persists, the head coach is subject to a penalty as determined by FNL commissioners.

KEY REMINDERS

**THERE ARE NO KICKOFFS. BLOCKING IS NOT ALLOWED.
ZERO-TOLERANCE FOR POOR SPORTSMANSHIP.
*COACHES COACH • PLAYERS PLAY • REFEREES REF • FANS CHEER***

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